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DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION IN EFL CLASSES

(ROZVÍJENÍ DOVEDNOSTI POROZUMÌNÍ TEXTU V HODINÁCH ANGLIÈTINY)

Diplomová práce: 2003 - FP- KAJ - 97

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Poèet

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V Liberci dne: 17. 5. 2003

Zadání DP

Diplomová práce zahrnuje akademický výzkum a praktické ověření teorie přímé instruktáže při rozvíjení čtenářských dovedností v anglickém jazyce.
Cílem je prokázat výhody přímé instruktáže pro porozumění textu.
Zpracování praktického projektu, analýza a interpretace výsledků v uvedené diplomové práci prokáží porozumění metodám analýzy teoretických východisek a jejich kritického zhodnocení a schopnost využití teoretických závěrů při volbě vhodných metod při výuce cizího jazyka.
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Specifikou uvedeného projektu je orientace na subjekt žáka při konstruování významu a důraz na rozvoj myšlení při práci s textem na druhém stupni ZŠ.

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Poděkování:

Dìkuji Mgr. Janì Neubauerové za všechny cenné pøipomínky, témìø andìlskou trpìlivost a pøátelský pøístup.
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ROZVÍJENÍ DOVEDNOSTI POROZUMĚNÍ TEXTU V HODINÁCH ANGLIČTINY

Zuzana MACHÁLKOVÁ **DP- 2003**

Vedoucí DP: Mgr. Jana Neubauerová

Resumé

Cílem diplomové práce je prokázat výhody metody pøímé instruktáže pro rozvoj dovednosti porozumìní textu v hodinách angliètiny na 2. stupni ZŠ. U souboru 32 žákù 8. a 9. tøídy ZŠ jsem diagnostickým testem urèila oblast, která žákùm pøi práci s textem èiní nejvìtší obtíže, a na tu jsem se pak soustøedila. Uplatnila jsem pøitom metodu pøímé instruktáže v kombinaci s technikou otevøené diskuse. Na základì vlastního pozorování, testu porovnávajícího schopnost žákù porozumìt textu v èeštinì a v angliètinì a hodnocení aktivit žáky samými jsem dospìla k závìru, že pøímá instruktáž vede k lepšímu porozumìní textu, a to zejména tím, že pøispívá k rozvoji kritického myšlení a celkovì výraznì zvyšuje aktivitu žákù pøi práci s textem. Zároveò rozvíjí další dovednosti jazykové (psaní, mluvení)

i obecnì intelektové (argumentaci, metakognici, tvoøivost a fantazii).

DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION IN EFL CLASSES

Summary

This Professional Project intends to prove the benefits of the use of Direct Instruction for the development of reading comprehension in EFL classes at lower-secondary school. First, a diagnostic test was given to 32 pupils from grades 8 and 9 in order to determine areas of comprehension difficulty to focus my teaching on. The reading activities I designed made use of Direct Instruction in combination with open discussion. My observation, a test comparing the learners' ability to comprehend Czech and English text, as well as the pupils' evaluation of the activities pointed to the strengths of Direct Instruction in developing reading comprehension, especially its critical component, and generally increasing learner involvement in reading. The Project also suggests potential implications for the development of other skills, both linguistic (writing, speaking) and those of general intellect (argumentation, metacognition, creativity, and fantasy).

DIE ENTWICKLUNG DER FÄHIGKEIT DES VERSTÄNDNISES VOM TEXT

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit soll die Vorteile der direkten Instruktage für die Entwicklung der Geshicklichkeit des Textverständnises in den Stunden der englischen Sprache auf der 2. Stufe der Grudschule beweisen. Bei einer Gruppe von 32 Schülern der 8. und 9. Klasse der Grudschule bestimmte ich mit Hilfe des diagnostischen Tests ein Gebiet, das den Schülern bei der Arbeit mit dem Text die grössten Schwierigkeiten bereitet, und auf dieses Gebiet konzentrierte ich mich dann. Ich benutzte die Metode der direkten Instruktage in Kombination mit der Technik der offenen Diskusion. Auf Grund meiner eigenen Beobachtung, des Tests, der die Fähigkeit der Schüler den Text in der tschechischen sowie in der englischen Sprache zu fassen verglich, kam ich zum Resultat, dass die direkte Instruktage zum besseren Verständnis vom Text führt, und so namentlich zur Entwicklung des kritischen Denkens beiträgt und so die Aktivität der Schüler markant erhöht. Zugleich entwickelt sie weitere Geschicklichkeiten der Sprache (Schreiben, Sprechen) sowie des allgemeinen Intelektes (Argumentation, Metakognition, Sch öpfung und Fantasie).

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I. ACADEMIC

1. The Role of Reading in Education

"Reading is one of the significant ways to develop a knowledgeable individual," asserts the American Educational Policies Commission (in Griese, 1977, p. 13). The merits of reading, they report, stem mainly from the fact that it develops higher-level thinking skills pupils need to solve problems in real life and that it provides access to an amount of knowledge much greater than any other language skill, at least in later stages of the educational process (ibid).

Therefore, it is highly desirable that pupils be trained in reading.

Rendering written language superior to spoken discourse, the Grammar-Translation Approach established the importance of texts in foreign language learning. Nonetheless, in the Grammar-Translation Method texts were used to practice translation and grammatical parsing rather than to develop reading itself.

Later on, ´natural´ methods developed in response to a growing need for communication, seeking to build learners' communicative competence in the target language. In the history of modern language teaching, reading was again recognized as the most important of the 4 language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) by supporters of the Reading Approach. This time, however, reading instruction began to focus on the development of reading comprehension.

Overcoming the idea of reading's supremacy, the current trend in language teaching is balanced skills within an integrated-skill lesson. Notwithstanding, the distribution of skills may vary depending on pupils' level of proficiency and their specific needs. I have found that most lower-secondary school teachers rate reading 3rd in importance to their pupils after speaking and listening. Consequently, when they can choose whether to use a text for reading, or for listening, many a teacher will opt for the latter, or, worse still, they will have the pupils follow the text with simultaneously playing the tape in order to "promote multisensory learning" or to "provide for a rich language input" (questionnaire ⇨ App. 1). Although Griese (1977, p. 11) advocates the practice of giving more attention to instruction in listening comprehension as a step toward improving reading comprehension, the simultaneous technique will not produce efficiency in either skill. Once pupils can follow the text they hear

in their textbooks, they are ´reading´ it. But at the same time, the tape proceeds at an unalterable pace, allowing little time for the pupils to check back in the text or to linger at a word or phrase to infer its meaning - activities efficient readers perform. Therefore, it is clear that the ´read & hear´ technique will not contribute to the development of reading skills and strategies. What it can do is enhance correct pronunciation and recall of specific details - and that is exactly what teachers often tend to emphasize in reading instruction, being assisted in their cause by textbook authors, who very often design texts to illustrate a language point rather than to develop reading comprehension. Thus, another frequent activity is reading and memorizing dialogs, or reading to obtain a model for writing. Learners too often read not to negotiate meaning from reading, but to be ready for learning new language. In other words, the integrative effort has resulted in the purpose of reading having been distorted and lost.

In my own schooling, I, too, have been to read formal and informal letters, comic strips, and many fact-based stories, the purposes being no different - i.e. a model to copy, a structure to learn, and facts to remember; the actual meaning would pass disregarded. I missed the reading I knew from Czech - I missed fairy tales, children's stories and rhymes, which would have been meaningful to *me*.

Thus, as soon as I had the opportunity to teach reading, I brought the class an Indian myth. Having made sure that they knew all the vocabulary they needed, I invited them to discuss the meaning, develop it and add to it - that is to create their own meaning. Unfortunately, the pupils seemed not to be enjoying that activity at all. Incapable of constructing the meaning on their own, they seemed to be waiting for my [teacher] interpretation so that they could learn what was correct and adopt it as their own. Without external direction, the pupils failed to invent their own purpose. Since "purpose shapes perception" (Duffy & Roehler, 1993, p. 163), they were devoid of basis for interpretation, being unable to logically structure the information in the text. Hence, they could recall minutiae, whereas the gist of the story remained blurred. More worringly, they would not make a single inference without teacher guidance, which, I believed, would be critical for their future reading.

The feeling that there was something wrong with reading instruction in English classes sparked my interest in this issue, which eventually led to my writing this paper. Not only did I begin observing methods different teachers used in teaching reading comprehension in English, but, as a Czech teacher, I also launched an investigation into pupils' ability to comprehend text in their mother tongue. My findings were similar to those of the PISA research carried out almost at the same time by OECD.

This research was conducted in the year 2000 as a part of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), focusing on reading competence of fifteen-year-old pupils from 32 countries regardless of what type or year of school they attended. The areas tested were obtaining information from text, interpretation, and critical evaluation. Various text types were used (both connected and disconnected).

According to the results of this study, the performance of Czech pupils was below average (The average score being 500, Czech pupils reached 492.), the most problematic areas being obtaining information through reading and its critical evaluation.

Regarding text types, Czech pupils proved better skills in comprehending narratives and presentations, whereas poor outcomes were reached in argumentative texts and instructions.

Besides that, the study revealed that they were better at working with disconnected texts, such as timetables and charts, than with connected ones. In this respect, the PISA research corroborated the findings of a similar study carried out in the Czech Republic in 1995 (Kramplová et al., 2002).

Seeing my chance of successful intervention, I embarked on a search for a more effective reading instruction. My fundamental premise being that once pupils understand the processes they engage in while comprehending a text, they will be able to make conscious decisions about when and how to use them to pursue whatever purpose they have. Following from this claim, I based my Professional Project on the methodology of Direct Instruction as a possible way of improving learners' reading comprehension. Thus, the following Professional Project attempts to explore and support potential benefits of direct reading instruction in English classes in developing higher-level comprehension at lower-secondary school.

2. The Reading Process

2. 1. The Concept of Meaning

Meese (1994) expresses a widely accepted view, saying that "the ultimate goal of reading instruction is for students to obtain meaning from what they read" (p. 226).

Meaning has long been considered as something definite, text-inherent and immutable to be uncovered through reading. Recently, there has been a clear shift toward a more dynamic concept of meaning, emphasizing the reader's active role in its construction. "Meaning is created at the very moment of reading," declares Ondøej Hausenblas (2001, p. 31). The

creation of meaning is based on constant interaction between the reader and the text (ibid, p. 28).

The two participants engaged in the interaction, i.e. the text and the reader, are the chief determinants of the meaning. As for the text, the factors affecting the construction of meaning are primarily the characteristics of the code (language), content, and the author's style (Èechová, 2000, p. 363). On the part of the reader, it is mainly his/her command of skills and strategies necessary to negotiate the meaning.

These skills and strategies involve a complexity of mental processes, typically referred to as reading comprehension, ranging from word-recognition (or microprocessing) to critical reasoning and metacognition.

Irwin (1991) points out that these processes occur simultaneously, they interact with each other; consequently, each process can contribute to the success of another (p. 5). Similarly, Griese (1977, p. 4) warns that "any attempt to dissect an organic whole [of reading comprehension] into distinct elements carries a danger of distortion".

Yet, for the purposes of language teaching, the abstract processes are usually reified as distinct reading skills and strategies. Typically, educators recognize *skimming* (i.e. reading for gist), *scanning* (i.e. reading for specific information), *intensive* reading (for detail), and *extensive* reading, also called reading for pleasure (Munby in Grellet, 1991; Gower et al, 1995 and others). These are usually referred to as reading skills although some experts prefer to call them reading strategies. For the purposes of my paper, I discriminate between *reading skills*, meaning skimming, scanning, etc., and *reading strategies*, referring to the reader's conscious implementation of a particular skill or skills.

The reader's mastery of reading comprehension processes depends on their experience with texts, their existing knowledge and, last but not least, on their intellectual development.
In the classroom, another determinant emerges - the teacher's method. Mosenthal (in Irwin, 1991, p.172) even suggests that "while reading researchers have tended to define reading comprehension primarily in terms of text, task, and subject contexts, the most important context influencing reading comprehension in classroom lessons may be the interaction between the teacher and the students."

2. 2. The Definition of Reading Comprehension

Owing to high complexity of the processes involved in comprehending a reading material, no single one, universally accepted definition of reading comprehension exists. Likewise, there is no unanimous consensus among reading educators about what critical comprehension is. Yet, the valid definitions tend to deal with *meaning* and its reconstruction through involved mental processes.

Before adopting a definition of reading comprehension as it is accepted by most linguists and used in teaching reading skills, I wanted to know how teachers understand this notion and how their interpretation of comprehension affects their teaching. To this end, I contacted 18 English teachers from different secondary schools in Liberec and asked them to fill in a questionnaire designed to explore the methods they use in teaching reading skills (⇨App.1). In one item they were asked to agree / disagree with the following two statements:

A. When a pupil is able to translate a text **word by word** (to Czech), it means he/she can understand the meaning.
B. When a pupil is able to remember and recall details from a text, it indicates he/she can understand the text.

While the vast majority of the respondents flatly opposed the first assumption (A.) - the ratio being 15 : 1[*] , in B. the difference between the number of pros and cons was far less striking (6 : 9), with the opposing stance still prevailing.

Let us now focus on what it is the learners are able to do when they can ´translate´ a passage of text into Czech. They are able to associate meaning with individual words and to replace them by their Czech equivalents. Yet, this may not suffice, not only because the text may contain idiomatic expressions, in which case the above procedure clearly fails to produce appropriate translations, but, above all, because every item has a different value once it has become part of a larger unit. An American film called "Give Us This Day" was played in our cinemas under the name "Dej nám tento den", which was perfectly correct as far as vocabulary was concerned, but which was rather inaccurate in terms of meaning, since the original words had been quoted from *Our Father (...) Give us this day our daily bread....*

[*] The rest of the respondents either did not answer this item at all, or their answers were irrelevant to the point of the statement and therefore could not be counted.

Conversely, some teachers asserted that it is not necessary that learners understand every word in order to grasp the meaning of the text as a whole.

These responses suggest that there are several levels or components of reading comprehension. Reading educators usually refer to 3 or 4 levels:

(Meese, 1994, p. 227)

Therefore, by claiming that learners understand the meaning when they are able to provide a word-to-word translation of a text, reading comprehension is being reduced to its literal component and understanding the meaning of a text to mere knowledge of vocabulary.
And, as Duffy & Roehler conclude, "although word recognition is a pre-requisite to comprehension, it is only a small part of the overall process" (1993, p. 160).

Similarly, the fact that a pupil is able to remember and recall details from a text only indicates that they have literal comprehension. It does not guarantee his/her comprehending the meaning in that the details they remember may be of secondary importance to the message of the text as a whole. One of the teachers pointed out that when reading a book, one does not remember every single detail, but mainly those that are essential for the continuity of understanding. Even though some teachers argued that pupils can only remember and recall a piece of information when they have understood it, expert studies have proved that people can remember even information which makes no sense to them - the amount is limited by 7±2 items (Atkinson et al., 1995, p. 305). Furthermore, even if the details are fully understood, they will have little value as long as they remain isolated. What is of grater importance here is connections between them. As two respondents put forward, perceiving connections between individual pieces of information means a step ahead in the process of comprehension. Yet still it may not exceed the literal level. However, as illustrated in Table 1, full comprehension comprises other levels as well: inferential, evaluative, and appreciative, which none of the respondents took into consideration.

Meese's classification of reading comprehension levels barely corresponds with the areas of reading skill as they were defined for the purposes of the PISA research.

These areas comprise
- obtaining information
- interpretation (comparing 2/more pieces of information, searching connections,...)
- critical evaluation of text

Critical evaluation involves evaluation of both content and style in terms of validity and adequacy. The reader actively relates the text to his existing knowledge of the world and reacts to it both emotionally and intellectually; text type and the reader's purpose determine which kind of response will predominate. Thus, the appreciative level from Table 1 has been included into the critical evaluation level in the PISA study.

For the purposes of my diploma thesis, I combined the two classifications in that I adopted Meese's division, joining levels 3 and 4 in one and implementing the skills factor.

The division will then be as follows:

Table 2	
LITERAL COMPREHENSION	Pupils can remember and recall details stated in the text without necessarily understanding connections between them. At this level, knowledge of vocabulary is the chief factor determining comprehension. The lowest level, literal comprehension requires little more than memory capacity. The information worked with is stated outright in the text, so the pupils only need to be able to locate it.
INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION	Pupils can make inferences based on the text they read - i.e. they can derive meanings that are no longer in the surface structure of the text. They engage in simple reasoning.
CRITICAL EVALUATION	Pupils can recognize the value of the information read, relating it to their previous reading experience and knowledge of the world. They can discriminate

	factual information from opinions and hypotheses in order to assess validity of content. They can also rate the information in the text in terms of importance to the author's point. Last but not least, they can respond to the author's style. Being the uppermost and most complex level of reading comprehension, critical evaluation involves higher-level thinking and reasoning.

It is important to develop reading comprehension at all the levels. However, Gunderson (1991) stresses that "higher levels of comprehension and thinking are more important than low-level, simple recall of facts" (p. 164). He makes a point saying that "every reading activity should have as its goal the development of higher-level comprehension skills" (ibid).

The factor which imposes certain restriction is cognitive maturity of the learner. Therefore, it is desirable that the teacher be aware of the relevant changes in pupils' cognition that may influence the development of critical comprehension.

The pupils in my study (i.e. grades 6-9) are usually referred to as adolescents (11-15 yrs). According to Jean Piaget, one of the foremost developmental psychologists, "adolescents enter the highest level of cognitive development (...), which is marked by the capacity for abstract thought" (Papalia et al., 2001, p. 537). He calls this stage the *Stage of Formal Operations*. This advance enables the adolescents to explore new dimensions of reality by understanding possibilities. Once the learners can think in terms of what might be true, they are capable of hypothetical reasoning (ibid, pp. 536-538). The attainment of formal operations enables the adolescents to develop and test their own hypotheses as well as to perceive and judge the value of someone else's hypotheses. They can now distinguish facts from opinions and hypotheses - the ability essential to critical evaluation. The newly gained conscience of indefinite possibilities also enables them to recognize that in some situations there may not be definite answers, which, in effect, allows for more open-ended questions to be included in reading comprehension practice.

Expectedly, there are limitations. Primarily, the ages marking the learner's readiness are just approximations in that there inevitably exist individual differences among pupils that determine the acquisition of hypothetical, combinatorial thinking. Besides that, the

advancement to the stage of formal operations is not discrete, but rather continuous. Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that maturation alone cannot account for the development of critical thinking generally and critical reading comprehension skills specifically. Without appropriate stimuli, the development of higher-level thinking in adolescents may not occur or may be considerably delayed (Èáp, 1997, p. 236).

A question arises what the teacher can do to accelerate the process of learners' intellectual maturation in the development of critical reading comprehension in a foreign language.

Summary:

Reading comprehension can be described as a process of constant interaction between the reader and the text in which the reader uses his/her own prior experience and the writer's cues to construct a set of meanings which are useful to them in a specific context.

The process of reading comprehension can involve various ´subprocesses´ (many of which are referred to and taught as separate reading skills), operating in a complex interplay. These subprocesses can be controlled by the reader and adjusted to fit his/her goals as well as the total situation in which comprehension is occurring.

When the reader consciously selects a process for a specific purpose and carries out a set of systematic steps, we speak of a reading strategy.

Reading comprehension proceeds at different levels, each of which appeals to different skills and strategies. The distribution of skills and strategies also varies, strategies being of primary concern at higher levels.

The complex reasoning involved in comprehending at higher levels accounts for reading comprehension being regarded as a mental ability. This carries three important implications:

(1) Comprehension skills and strategies are not exclusive to foreign languages (English), but are rather language-universal.

(2) It is possible to enhance reading comprehension in a foreign language by encouraging transfer of comprehension skills and strategies from pupils' mother tongue.

(3) Reading comprehension can only be developed within the restraints of pupils' intellectual maturity.

3. Methodology

3. 1. Need for Effective Reading Instruction versus Classroom Reality

The ultimate goal of reading instruction in schools is to create an independent reader capable of critical thought, i.e. a reader who is able to extract, interpret, evaluate and use the information obtained through reading for their own purposes.

However, what really happens is that as early as "in the primary grades, students lose their independence and the will to make the meaning their own and to share their opinions with others," reports Ondøej Hausenblas (2001, p. 26). He blames teachers' method of delivering reading instruction, criticizing their preventing diversity of opinion in their pupils by prioritizing the sole ´correct´ interpretation of the text and thereby discouraging autonomous construction of the meaning on the part of the learner. Consequently, the teacher becomes the leading factor in determining the interpretation of meaning, pressing the learners into an essentially passive role in which they read a text in search of the ´right´ meaning - a meaning which was defined prior to their first encounter with the text. This ´right´ or ´official´ meaning, as Hausenblas calls it, is usually regarded as something definite, stated by literary experts or by textbook authors. "Possible differences in understanding and interpretation offered by students," he goes on to say, "are often considered an unwelcome diversion from the ´official´ meaning" (ibid).

Another characteristic trait of reading instruction in our schools he mentions is the enormous individualization of the reading experience. "In the schools of the Czech Republic," he states, "the analysis and interpretation of text, both is [sic] generally realised through individual reading or research, rather than through a group process of discussion and negotiation" (ibid).

This phenomenon may partially be caused by the long-standing concept of *meaning* as a given and unequivocal entity rather than something flexible and prone to different interpretations. Once there is only one ´correct´ interpretation, there is nothing left to be discussed. However, "students need opportunities to experience how their personal understanding of the meaning of a text is created, how their understanding develops and how it differs from or agrees with other readers' views and understanding" (Hausenblas, 2001, p. 27). "Sharing their findings can help students to create the meaning for themselves" (ibid, p. 28).

In the previous chapter, I stressed the importance of developing reading comprehension at different levels. Nevertheless, if correctness is to be the sole basis for assessing interpretation of meaning, most comprehension must logically remain at its lowest, literal level. It is only at this level that the dimension of correctness / incorrectness is valid and can be applied unexceptionally, since even inferences may be subject to debate. In addition, as evaluation of form (author's language and style, text structure, ...) involves higher-level comprehension and is realized more in terms of appropriateness vs. inadequacy than strict correctness / incorrectness, it is often excluded from reading instruction, too.

Let us now consider another aspect. In mother tongue, literal comprehension completely and inferential comprehension to a large extent is taken for granted and believed to occur automatically. In a foreign language, however, word recognition and knowledge of vocabulary and structures may appear critical for the mere attainment of literal understanding, which consequently impedes higher-level comprehension. Even pupils who possess adequate knowledge of vocabulary (which does not mean they have to know every word!) and grammar may experience difficulties in comprehending an English text at higher levels. This occurs because pupils attentional capacity is limited, explain La Berge and Samuels (in Meese, 1994, p. 227). When more attention is allocated to the task of simple word decoding, little attention remains to comprehend the meaning of what is read. La Berge and Samuels tailored this theory to children wild mild learning disabilities, whose greater demand for attentional capacity at the very basic level of comprehension is caused by deficiency in word-attack skills. However, similar symptoms can be observed in non-native learners of English, whose comprehension is hampered by their command of lexicon and grammar. In other words, non-native readers have to make more endeavor to associate meanings with individual words and to decode grammatical patterns, which may result in their failing to perceive the information structure, to realize and interpret connections, or to critically evaluate the text (provided that they encounter it for the first time). As a result, mastery of lexicon tends to be a ´cheap´ substitute for the complex whole of reading comprehension, and reading instruction in ELT is inclined to be more content oriented.

Such an attitude toward reading instruction has in the long run far-reaching consequences for the development of pupils' reading comprehension. Emphasizing mastery of lexicon in reading instruction leads to pupils' being increasingly dependent on knowledge of vocabulary in their reading. Sometimes, it may be tempting to focus primarily on vocabulary since word recognition and vocabulary become automatic once they have been mastered. On the contrary,

there is no such routine in reading comprehension strategies, for "all comprehension strategies are metacognitive. That is, you teach your students to be conscious of them and how to use them so they can access them when reading text on their own" (Duffy & Roehler, 1993, p. 161). Irwin (1991) supports his claim, saying that "each time a reader decides to use a specific process in a specific way because of a specific context, he/she is making a metacognitive decision"(p. 110). Though, used repeatedly, Duffy & Roehler (1993) admit, comprehension strategies become increasingly automatic, almost subconscious, especially when pupils read an easy or familiar text. Nonetheless, the moment they encounter a text which is difficult in some respect - it may just contain a plenty of unknown vocabulary, those pupils who are able to consciously access the useful strategies are in a better position for comprehending the text (p. 161). Therefore, in contrast to knowledge of vocabulary, which determines primarily comprehension of a particular text, knowledge of comprehension strategies may contribute to increased understanding of any text. In the sense, by understanding the reasoning processes, learners possess a tool to provide for comprehension in their future reading.

The benefits discussed make it vital for every pupil to have a good command of comprehension strategies and skills. Although some pupils, particularly those with a rich language background or excessive reading experience, may develop these skills and strategies incidentally, others need explicit instruction and demonstration (ibid).

3. 2. Direct Instruction

3. 2. 1. Foundations of the Approach

Pioneered by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966), who reported the benefits of a highly structured repetitive instruction in teaching basic skills to preschoolers with disabilities, Direct Instruction gained wide recognition among the educational theorists through the work of B. V. Rosenshine (1976). Later on, Engelmann and Carnine (1991) developed an instructional approach based on the following premises:

⇨ Design communications that are faultless using a logical analysis of the stimuli, not a behavioral analysis of the learner.
⇨ Predict that the learner will learn the concept conveyed by the faultless presentation.
⇨ If the communication is logically faultless and if the learner has the capacity to respond to

the logic of the presentation, the learner will learn the concept conveyed by the communication.

⇨ Present the communication to the learner and observe whether the learner actually learns the intended concept or whether the learner has trouble. This information shows the extent to which the learner does/does not possess the mechanisms necessary to respond to the faultless presentation of the concept.

⇨ Design instruction for the unsuccessful learner that will modify the learner's capacity to respond to the faultless presentation. (p. 3)

The faultless presentation "rules out the possibility that the learner's inability to respond appropriately to the presentation, or to generalize in the predicted way, is caused by a flawed communication rather than by learner characteristics" (ibid.). In other words, Engelmann & Carnine focused on teacher instruction, striving to emend its flaws and thus to oust one of the variables determining reading comprehension. Hence, the cornerstones of Direct Instruction are teacher demonstration, guided practice and feedback, which later became hallmarks of various innovative conceptions of learning, such as Mastery Learning and ITIP.

Having reviewed the research on effective teaching, Baumann (in Irwin, 1991, pp. 17-19) concludes that Direct Instruction is one of the factors consistently related to achievement. He says that research points to a 5-step procedure involving:

(1) an introduction telling what the pupils are to learn and why the skill is important
(2) an example of text on which it can be used
(3) direct instruction in which students are told and shown how to do the skill
(4) teacher-directed application of the skill
(5) independent practice

(Activities submitted in my lesson plans respect these steps.)

3. 2. 2. Strategies to be Taught

Direct Instruction focuses on concepts, operations, rules and problem solving. It involves metacognitive strategy instruction to enhance the learner's mastering of critical skills and strategies, the ultimate goal being their autonomous use. Duffy & Roehler (1993) identify 4 areas of metacognitive strategies as they emerge in the process of reading (pp. 162-167):

1. Initiating strategies - Applied in pre-reading, they include activating prior knowledge of topic, text structures, and purposes of both the author and the reader.
2. During-reading strategies - These strategies are used by the reader to monitor the process of comprehension, to identify discrepancies between his/her predictions and the emerging meanings in the text so that they can modify their initial predictions.

   During-Reading strategies aim to resolve 2 kinds of problems:

   What the author intended

   What meaning the reader constructs that goes beyond the author's intended message.

   As noted earlier, many of the traditionally taught reading skills can be recast as during-reading strategies (See section I. B of this paper).
3. Post-reading strategies - The process of meaning construction is not completed by the moment pupils finish reading. Some of the crucial reflection occurs after reading. The processes involved focus both on *text restructuring* (summarizing, determining the main idea etc.), to which end the reader employs organizing strategies, and on *critical evaluation*.
4. Study strategies - Though they engage in building a level of scientific literacy, they are not of primary concern for reading instruction.

3. 2. 3. Modifications of Direct Instruction

In the typical direct reading lesson, the teacher preteaches new vocabulary, introduces the background of the text and directs the learners' comprehension by generating questions which compel the learners to think and comprehend at different levels (See Table 2). As learners demonstrate their understanding and use of the strategy, the teacher gradually reduces his/her assistance.

Stauffer warned that this approach put comprehension in teacher's hands, excluding pupils from the process of constructing meaning (in Gunderson, 1991, p. 164). In recognition of this

danger, he developed the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA), which accommodated the alleged disadvantage of direct reading. To minimize the danger of the teacher usurping all the initiative in reconstructing the meaning of text, he based his method on reader prediction. On one hand, DRTA increases learner involvement, on the other hand, prediction alone cannot account for critical comprehension, and with teacher intervention severely limited, the attainment of critical comprehension may be at risk. Yet, these two approaches, if opposite, are not mutually exclusive options. Strictly speaking, in DRTA the teacher is allowed to ask just 3 questions:

What do you think this story is about?
What do you think will happen next?
What makes you think so?

Higher level questions are undesirable if they are not generated by pupils.

To prevent teacher control of meaning and still preserve the advantages of their guidance, in my Professional Project I adopted a more liberal version of DRTA, implementing learner prediction in the pre-reading and while-reading stages.(For details see the Activity Design section of this paper.)

Goodman (ibid, p. 165) concludes that "critical reading does not occur because students are not encouraged to predict while reading." Stauffer's DRTA promotes prediction and thus, in accordance with Goodman´s claim, encourages higher-level comprehension skills. Gunderson (1991) assures that "DRTA is a powerful method for developing higher-level comprehension skills at all levels [of proficiency]"(p.167).

3. 3. Direct Instruction versus Corrective Feedback

Despite the above arguments advocating its use, Direct Instruction in skills and strategies of reading comprehension is rather unpopular among teachers. With the exception of one teacher, all teachers who answered my questionnaire rejected Direct Instruction. Some of them complained about not having enough time for such a time-consuming activity, others said they lacked suitable texts, and still others found it ridiculous to teach comprehension skills and strategies directly while nothing like that happened in L1. Instead, most of them prefer teaching reading comprehension indirectly. First, the teacher sets the purpose for reading, or

they elicit a purpose from learners' predictions. They usually also preteach new vocabulary in order to facilitate pupils' comprehension. Then follows the reading with teacher-posed questions designed to monitor comprehension and, predominantly, to evaluate conclusions.
My research has shown that the most common types of questions asked by English teachers to check comprehension in reading activities are *Yes/No/Don't know* questions and *True/False* questions with answers stated explicitly in the surface structure of the text, which relate to level 1 of my classification of reading comprehension levels. The skills needed are those of information searching. Few teachers incorporate questions which require inferences and still fewer have the pupils engaged in reasoning.

The majority of the teachers are convinced that regular reading practice alone will guarantee pupils' acquisition of reading comprehension skills and strategies. The feedback they provide emphasizes content over the process of reasoning. While teachers often use questions to monitor pupils' understanding of content or evaluate conclusions, they do little to focus their pupils on reasoning processes. In other words, they only check outcomes of these processes, assuming that understanding of comprehension reasoning will evolve automatically once the learners are provided relevant feedback on content. Griese (1977) cautions that although comprehension of content is closely linked to the process of mental reasoning, these two goals are distinct (p. 161):

> There is a means-ends relationship between process and content. Although the end product of comprehension is understanding specific content, the means to that understanding is the reasoning used to reconstruct text. If you limit comprehension instruction to the content of the immediate text, then your students receive no explicit information about *how* to comprehend. Consequently, you will be unable to gradually shift control of the comprehension process to students.

Teachers failing to distinguish between process and content or just neglecting process, pupils can only rely upon repeated exposure to reading material for development of effective reading comprehension skills and strategies. Reading comprehension is practiced rather than systematically developed. However, while extensive practice is believed to bring about comprehension in mother tongue, it is seldom enough in a foreign language. As stated previously, in spite of the fact that more efficient readers are likely to discover comprehension strategies without having them explained explicitly, and still other pupils may manage to transfer the useful strategies from L1, the rest of the learners are left unaided with uncertain outcomes. In addition, the transfer itself may be problematic because comprehension

reasoning may not be developed in pupils' mother tongue either. Conversely, if it is efficient in L1, it is likely to occur subconsciously; thus it may be difficult for the pupil to monitor and understand it. Without understanding the process of reasoning, the pupil can hardly apply it in different circumstances.

4. Thesis

In contrast to corrective feedback, Direct Instruction encourages the learner to reflect on the reasoning processes they engage in when reading a text. **Therefore, the implementation of Direct Instruction in reading skills and strategies may foster pupils' understanding of mental processes involved in comprehending text at different levels and consequently contribute to pupils' more rapid advancement toward higher levels or reading comprehension, involving critical evaluation.**

II. PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

This section provides an overall framework of my Professional Project, comprising:

(1) Aims

(2) Theoretical foundation

(3) Practical setting

(4) Research tools - questionnaire

- textbook analysis
- onset test
- observation and reflection

(5) Activity design criteria

(6) Lesson plans and reflections

(7) Evaluation of outcomes

(1) AIMS

The aim of this project is to examine and evaluate the benefits of the implementation of Direct Instruction in reading in the TEFL classroom for the development of higher-level thinking and reasoning essential for full comprehension of text.

(2) THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Drawing upon the large body of educational research conducted on the effectiveness of Direct Instruction in the process of learning (Engelmann & Carnine, Rosenshine, Goodman, Binder, Gersten, and others), this professional project intends to apply the Direct Instruction approach to the context of teaching reading comprehension skills and strategies in English classes at lower-secondary school.

(3) PRACTICAL SETTING

I carried out this project at the 3rd elementary school (The 5th May street) in Liberec during my 4th-year teaching practice and several consecutive visits within a total period of six months.

Out of 32 pupils participating in the experiment, 16 were from grade 8, 16 from grade 9.

(4) RESEARCH TOOLS

- In order to map the methods of reading instruction used by teachers in TEFL classes, I distributed a questionnaire to 18 English teachers from different secondary schools in Liberec (⇨App. 1).
- Textbook analysis was included to evaluate the most frequently used textbook in terms of text selection and reading activities included, because some teachers reported lack of suitable materials to be the main reason for their not implementing Direct Instruction (⇨App. 2).
- To assess the pupils' ability to apply reading comprehension skills and strategies, I developed a diagnostic onset test (⇨App. 3, 4). I adapted texts from *Myth Makers* (Kalnitz & Judd, 1986) and *Reward Pre-intermediate* (Greenall, 1994) so as to detect the most common obstacles to reading comprehension to determine the focus of my instruction.
- The major part of the data comes from my during-teaching observation and subsequent reflection (⇨Lesson Plans section).

(5) ACTIVITY DESIGN CRITERIA

Growing out of the theoretical foundations of Direct Instruction approach as discussed earlier, the following represent the key principles underlying the design of the reading activities I used:

A. As for characteristics of the text used, it is to be:

- a new text (one the pupils are encountering for the fist time, and have not read, listened to or worked with in any way)
- a connected text - i.e. any printed matter that represents a complete message (Duffy & Roehler, p. 166)

Since few texts in Projects I, II lend themselves to development of critical comprehension, I used my own texts adapted from various sources (to be acknowledged for each particular activity).

B. The cornerstone of all activities is the use of Direct Instruction.

C. The activities are to address all the 3 levels of comprehension (See Table 2), with particular attention to the higher ones.

D. Reading is to be realized through whole-class discussions, groupwork and pairwork so that the pupils can check their interpretation of meaning through comparison and exchange.

E. To enhance comprehension in different stages of the process of reading, pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading tasks are being used.

F. Reading strategies and skills are taught as part of an integrated skill lesson; yet reading sometimes dominates.

(6) LESSON PLANS AND REFLECTIONS

Before detailed lesson plans and reflections are submitted, a more general description is provided to introduce the procedure I followed in 9. A class. The steps can be summarized as follows:

a) In the pre-reading stage, I focused on learner prediction as a way of stimulating divergent thinking in the pupils and at the same time reducing the teacher's role in determining the interpretation of meaning. To facilitate prediction and imagination, I encouraged the learners to generate associations to the title of the text. Thereby, they also related the text to their existing knowledge. As it is desirable that they employ imagination, I used Alex Osborn's brainstorming technique, which defers evaluation of pupils' ideas. During this stage, I would also preteach difficult vocabulary.

   In the next step, I had the pupils read the first paragraph of the text so that they could confirm / refute their expectations and correct / refine their predictions about the text.

   Next, I made use of the pupils' predictions to set up a purpose for reading in the form of 2 or 3 questions, believing that pupils get more easily involved in reading when the purpose stems from their own motivation. In addition to the increased involvement, pupils learn to take responsibility for their reading. Finally, recognizing their own purpose will, again, foster learners' independent comprehension as they can suit their reading to their needs.

b) Having formulated ´purpose questions´ for their first reading, the learners would begin reading the text in search of answers. They were instructed to stop reading and raise their hands the moment they found them. While reading, they were to underline relevant answers and circle unknown or interesting words.

   At times, it happened that the text failed to provide answers to their questions. In that case, they would report on what interesting information they had learned.

   To record their findings, they used the K-W-L chart (created by Ogle, 1986):

WHAT I KNOW	**WHAT I WANT TO KNOW**	**WHAT I HAVE LEARNED**
pupils' prior knowledge in the form of associations	´purpose questions´	answers + other information obtained

The K-W-L method activates higher-level thinking strategies which help pupils construct meaning from what they read as well as monitor their progress toward their goals.
It promotes learner reflection in that after reading the text learners can go back to the K-column and check if any of their prior knowledge was inaccurate. Besides that, they can check the W-column to determine the questions that the text failed to answer.
After they finished reading the whole text for the first time, they could choose several words (usually 5) and ask me about their meaning. They could discuss which words they wanted me to clarify in order not to waste the offered assistance.

c) Gist Instruction

At this point, I usually asked the pupils to recall what different things were mentioned in the text (They could use their charts.). Eventually, we would list them on the blackboard. Then, the pupils were assigned to cluster all related items together with the aim to determine the main topic - unless it was apparent at first sight.
Having agreed upon the topic, the class were offered a set of possible gist sentences (i.e. sentences summarizing the author's main point). Their task was to choose the correct one and find evidence to prove inappropriateness of the others.

d) Getting back to the K-W-L chart, I asked the pupils to label the information they had learned as **fact** / **opinion** / **hypothesis** (F / O / H). To accomplish this task, they had to search the text for specific clues (e.g. viewpoint adverbs, evaluative expressions, etc.). Afterward, they would proceed to evaluation of statements from the text. Basically, I used 2 types of exercises to practice information evaluation - one focused on discriminating between F / O / H, requiring the learners to justify their choices; the other was the traditional True / False (T / F) exercise, expecting the learners to identify the status of the information in order to determine its validity.

e) The final part of the comprehension procedure involved personalization of the information obtained through the reading experience. The activities I designed intended to enable the learners to see the text within the context of other texts, their own experience and reality of the surrounding world. Typically, the pupils were encouraged to select a particular aspect of the issue discussed in the text to react on.

The above procedure was to serve as a model for the pupils in approaching a text, the ultimate goal of this instruction being for the pupils to adopt (and possibly adjust) this procedure to their own reading purposes. Apart from the lesson plans submitted in the Lesson Plans section of this paper, a sample text with a set of tasks following the described pattern is enclosed in App. 5.

9. A - LESSON PLAN 1

(Introduction)

1. AIM: Discuss characteristics of a good reader.

T: Who is a good reader? How does he/she read ? (Quickly)
Only quickly? I can read a text very quickly, but I will not get the message. I will not know what it is about.

T makes the pupils realize that a good reader understands what he/she reads. That's the most important thing.

2. AIM: Demonstrate the importance of associations and predictions in the construction of meaning.

T: Now we will see how much *you* can understand from reading. Make 3 groups of 5 people. You will all get the same sentence. Read it and explain what it means; try to say it in other words.

The groups are given the following sentence: WILL YOU GIVE ME A RING?

Group A is given the sentence plus picture A (an office with office staff making phone calls).
Group B is given the sentence along with picture B (a loving couple).
Group C gets only the sentence *Will you give me a ring?* with no prompts.
Pupils discuss the meaning in groups → write their interpretations on the blackboard (for comparison). T invites them to find reasons why they guessed the way they did. The aim is to have the pupils realize the effect of context clues on the interpretation of meaning.

T: You can see that the situation in which the sentence is said influences your understanding of its meaning. The meaning you get depends on what you expect to find. If your expectations match (agree with) what you read, you can understand it more easily. If not, you have to correct them. So it is good when you learn to expect as many things as possible.

T explains the essence of associative thinking and has the pupils practice generating associations (For suggested activities see 8. B - Lesson Plan 1).

REFLECTION

The main goal of the introductory lesson was to make the pupils express their ideas about what qualities and skills constitute an efficient reader. When I asked their opinions, they replied immediately: A good reader is a fast reader. When I pointed out that reading speed is not the only criterion of a successful reading performance, they started thinking of correct pronunciation being also a measure of efficiency. Finally, they mentioned the recall of information from text. To dispel this last misconception, I presented them with the sentence *Driving is a piece of cake.,* which they were able to repeat, but not to interpret due to its idiomatic component. Eventually, they figured out that good readers understood what they read.

In Activity 2, the 3 groups developed 3 different interpretations of the sentence, reflecting the character of the provided prompts, or their absence respectively:

A: Will you phone me?

B: Will you marry me?

C: You have [sic] present for me. What?

Group A determined that the speaker was arranging a phone call. Group B assumed the young woman in their picture wished to marry the man. Group C was devoid of clues that would direct them to such a discrete interpretation, which made them agree on the most convenient meaning they could derive from their own experience. Hence, their interpretation was rather vague compared to the other two.

The class were amazed at there being such a great disparity in interpretation. Thus, I could make a point, stressing how much of the meaning may pass unheeded when the reader fails to activate the proper links within his/her existing knowledge that enable him/her to assign meaning to text, the merits of prediction and associations now being manifest. The pupils understood that the prediction strategy may help them reveal an unequaled array of meanings. This transparency of the purpose for learning a strategy is an indisputable necessity provided that the goal is for the use of the strategy to become learner-initiated.

9. A - LESSON PLANS 2 + 3

(The following activities were conducted within 2 consecutive lessons.)

1. AIMS: Raise interest in the topic; have the learners generate predictions about the text.

The pupils have managed to reconstruct a cut picture featuring 2 dinosaurs.

T: What do you know about dinosaurs? Let's try associations. I will start, O.K.? What I can think of looking at this picture is the Jurassic Park. And now you ...

T elicits the pupils' associations related to dinosaurs and writes them up.

T: Now have a look at the title. Why do you think it includes the word *Man*? What's the text going to be about? (Pupils add associations + make predictions.)
This is what we know. Now tell me what you want to learn. Make questions.

Pupils formulate ´purpose questions´; T draws a K-W-L chart.

2. AIMS: Have the learners confirm / refute their predictions; clarify unknown / difficult vocabulary.

T: Read the text and try to answer your questions. Mark the answers in the text. If you come across any words you don't know and cannot do without, go the blackboard and write them up. → Later on, the whole class cooperates in working out explanations.

Having stated their purpose questions, pupils read the text in quest for answers. When they have completed the first reading, they compare their findings, and reflect on the success / failure of their predictions.

3. AIM: Develop literal and inferential comprehension

The class is working on Exercises I + II on the worksheet (⇨App. 6). First, T models the steps for the class:

T: *"Dinosaur" means a "terrible reptile". Reptile* is a strange word, but I saw it somewhere in the text. Where was it? Oh, it's here, in the second line. What is it this sentence says? *Many tales have been told* ... Well, there are two important pieces of

information. Which ones? (T elicits answers.) →

1. Many tales have been told about "terrible reptiles".
2. Their name [dinosaur] translates into "a terrible reptile". And that's it. I've got the answer. Can you now go on?

T guides the learners through the exercise, driving their attention to treacherous words, such as *all, only, no, none, everything, always,...* as well as teaching them to seek paraphrases. In time, as they become more confident about the strategy, T gradually reduces her assistance.

4. AIM: Teach the pupils to discriminate between FACTS / OPINIONS / HYPOTHESES.

T: When reading, you will find 3 different types of information.

T defines each type:

Fact	**Opinion**	**Hypothesis**
• = a statement which is always true • the evidence is clear • it has been proved and cannot be doubted	• = personal viewpoint (not objective; may differ) from the reader's view • evaluates (good / bad) • likely to contain words: *unfortunately, it's a pity, I think / believe, in my opinion,* etc.	• = sth. possible, evidence-based, but does not have to be right ⇨ • examination is needed • words: *possibly, maybe,* etc.

T asks the pupils to match the following characteristics with the appropriate column on the blackboard according to the type of information they typify:

IT HAS BEEN PROVED CANNOT BE PROVED MAY BE PROVED / DISPROVED

The class do Exercises III + IV together; T checks their responses instantly. In Exercise IV, T urges that the pupils give evidence by providing concrete examples from the text.

... IN THE NEXT LESSON

5. AIMS: Reinforce and further develop the learners' prediction strategy; revise the typology of information found in text.

T may start by asking each pupil to produce 1 sentence about dinosaurs (They should not repeat what has been said already.). As the learners report what they remember, T asks them to indicate what type of information their particular sentence contains. ⇨ Pupils (+ T) summarize the main characteristics of F, O, H.

6. AIM: Familiarize the pupils with the acronym "MAY FIVE" to teach them determine the level of comprehension involved.

T: O.K. I can see that you can remember a lot of things. Now I will make questions about the text and you will give answers. But my questions will be special:

MAY	**F**	**I**	**V**	**E**	**?'s**
BE ?'s	A	N	I	X	(Experience questions = ones
(hypo-	C	F	E	P	that help pupils invest their
thetical)	T	E	W	E	background knowledge.)
	U	R	P	R	
	A	E	O	I	
	L	N	I	E	
		T	N	N	
		I	T	C	
		A		E	
		L			

(This acronym has been modeled on Cooper's acronym *FIVE,* originally referring to Factual, Inferential, Vocabulary, and Experience questions. For reference see New Ways in Teaching Reading. TESOL, 1993.)

Once the pupils have grasped the principles of MAY FIVE Questioning, they may take over the initiative. An adaptation of this procedure is "*Reciprocal Questioning*" (developed by Cooper & Petrovsky, 1976), where T and the pupils take turns in questioning.

7. AIM: Practice prediction via MAY FIVE Questioning.

T assists the pupils in formulating 5 questions they expect to be treated and answered in the text. Afterward, the pupils read the text and discuss the answers they found / did not find. The class forms a cooperative unit.

8. AIM: Teach the learners to further develop the meaning of the text, respecting the pattern used by the author.

The class proceeds with Exercise V, first searching the text for relevant examples, and only later generating their own sentences.

9. AIM: Promote critical judgment.

(Exercise VI)

T: Now, try to decide who has done more for the world. The man, or the dinosaur? Let's vote on it. Who thinks that the man, hands up ...

10. AIM: Teach the learners to discriminate between the set of meanings which are text-inherent and their own mental constructs.

(I skipped Exercise VII focusing on grammar practice.) Apart from inventing a title that would fit the second text, I instructed the pupils to illustrate the story.

T: Take a pencil (not a pen!) and draw a picture to illustrate the story.

After they finished drawing, I asked them to read the text once again.

T: Read the whole text carefully. Then take a pen or a marker, and highlight all things from your picture that are described in the text the way you depicted them.

Pupils display their works so that all of them can see them (⇨App. 6).

REFLECTION

In the pre-reading activity (Activity 1), the pupils resisted my attempts to spark their interest in the topic. Later on, when I asked them to anticipate what the text they were going to read might be about, they would not make a single guess. Reminding them of the power of prediction to boost reading comprehension, I suggested that they read the introductory and concluding paragraphs in search of inspiration. Having skimmed the first few lines of the text, the pupils started to generate associations to the topic, such as *tail, strong teeth, die out,* and *200 million years ago*.

Despite the fact that I really had to press them into transforming their associations into purpose questions, they eventually managed to formulate 4 questions:

(1) Where did they [dinos] live?
(2) When did they live?
(3) What did they eat?
(4) Why did they die?

The questions they made up were central to the topic and thus very likely to be answered directly in the text. At the same time, they were well formulated and clear enough to mold the learners' perception of the text. As a result, the pupils were quite successful in answering them.

To my astonishment, some pupils began even marking the answers in the text while reading without having been instructed to do so. I indicated it was a good strategy to be used by all of them.

When we proceeded to the T / F exercises (Activity 3), I was greatly pleased to be able to show the learners that they already knew most of the answers from the prediction stage (purpose questions), which again pointed to the strengths of prediction in an efficient comprehension of text. In this case, the teacher-designed comprehension questions matched the pupil-developed purpose questions, providing the pupils with a sense of accomplishment. The "magic" of such an incidental fit would not normally be possible with the teacher exercising control of the comprehension process. In a teacher-directed comprehension, learners have no voice in determining the purpose, for it is dictated by the teacher and expressed in the form of comprehension questions.

In Exercises I and II (See the handout ⇨App. 6), the pupils tended to focus on content, so they did not attend to the reasoning involved. Although the main aim was to teach the strategy, at times I, too, found it increasingly difficult not to get sidetracked into discussing the content of the text. Modeling the strategy is perhaps the most demanding part of the instruction since it requires teacher's constant self-monitoring.

Generally, in Exercises I and II, pupils were quick to answer if the answer could be traced in the surface structure of the text (level 1 of reading comprehension), while they found it difficult to make inferential guesses. They were hopeless at interpreting the sentence: *Most of the dinosaurs had a strong tail.*, which required multiple inference (Dinos were heavy → They moved with the help of their tail → Their tail must have been strong.).

In Activity 4, I conveyed the presentation in Czech in order to avoid unnecessary misconceptions. The class seemed to have grasped the basic principles of the distinction. However, they were misled by *maybe*, taking the statement for sure, and when a piece of information was found in the text word by word, they often ignored the surrounding context. They, for instance, disregarded the expression *unfortunately*. Unable though they were to trace its meaning, they could understand the sentence which followed. In addition, the presence of a comma between the disjunct and the following clause made them think of the two parts as separate. I encouraged peer correction as some pupils were able to correct their classmates, using the checklist of typical expressions delivered during the presentation. At this stage, they still proceeded rather mechanically. Consequently, in Exercise IV, they were at pains trying to supply concrete examples from the text.

At the beginning of the next lesson, Activity 5 was intended to reactivate the pupils' knowledge of the topic. Besides, it provided valuable feedback on the previous lesson. I was surprised how much the learners were able to recall. More importantly, what most of them recalled was clearly linked to the purpose questions they had set up in Activity 2, suggesting a positive effect of prediction on recall. On the whole, the pupils most easily recalled facts.

In the same way, in the following task (Activities 6 and 7), the class displayed a relatively good understanding of facts and a considerably poorer ability to handle opinions. There was some confusion about what an inference was, and much hopelessness about formulating hypothetical questions. I noticed there were language barriers (The pupils did not know how to form questions with modals, which they had linked with hypotheses.) as well as a general misunderstanding of the notion itself. In a sense, this activity proved rather counterproductive

in that instead of reinforcement and consolidation of the pupils' knowledge, it led to a widespread confusion. Even though my switching into Czech helped to partially allay the panic, I gave up the idea of reexplaining the issue, since every explanation only threatened to further escalate the perplexity. Hence, I eventually resorted to asking only factual questions in order to restore the pupils' confidence, which was in flat contradiction of the intended aim of this activity, since the acronym *MAY FIVE* was to keep the pupils from using only factual, literal questions.

Having reflected on the flaws of my instruction, I tried to suggest a remedial activity that would help accommodate the ascertained difficulties. Unfortunately, I have not yet had time to pilot it, so I cannot offer any guidelines for practical implementation. The principle idea of this remedial activity is alteration of a simple factual statement. First, the learners will extract a fact from what they read. In the next step, they will be guided in transforming the fact into an opinion by anteposing an evaluative expression. Finally, they will be encouraged to modify the fact by inventing reasons for it, thus converting the fact to a hypothesis.

Example:

(1) Some dinosaurs only ate plants. = **fact**

(2) It is funny that some dinosaurs only ate plants. = **opinion**

(3) Some dinosaurs only ate plants because they had bad teeth. = **hypothesis** (may not be serious)

In Activity 8 (´What else could the man say?´), the pupils seemed to be at a loss for ideas. After a while, one of them put forward: *I will not become the master of all animals.*, simply copying the used structure without considering the actual meaning of it. In contrast, another pupil invented a far more plausible sentence: *I will built* [sic] *big town.*, which was compatible with the man's boastful behavior.

Activity 9 culminated into a passionate discussion. While the majority of the learners immediately voted for the man, 3 people stood up for the dinosaur, generating arguments to support their claim. Their conclusive argument that evolved from the discussion was that THE MAN HAS DONE EVERYTHING TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE. In other words, the rest of the class conciliated that it was better to die out not having caused any harm than to accomplish a little while destroying much. Since they had to generate arguments that clearly

went beyond the knowledge obtained from the text, and they also had to evaluate other speakers' arguments, they obviously engaged in critical reasoning.

The aim of Activity 10 was to make the pupils aware of how their existing knowledge may influence their perception of text. The point to be made is that the highlighted parts should be similar in all their pictures, whereas the faint drawing representing a superstructure to the core meaning will be the chief discriminant. In reality, the pictures were rather dissimilar due to a large amount of personal investment on the part of the learners (Some of them completely omitted the man). On one hand, excessive personal experiencing may lead to greater learner interest in the topic, which consequently stimulates emotional and intellectual response and is therefore conducive to critical thought. On the other hand, it may be the cause of distorted perception in so far that it impedes valid critical judgment.

The picture of a big man towering over a crouching small dinosaur is an outstanding example of advanced critical judgment (⇨App. 6).

8. B - LESSON PLAN 1

(Introduction)

1. AIMS: Raise pupils' awareness of the processes they engage in before and while reading; introduce the method of prediction; enhance pupils' associations.

T: Do you remember the story about Pocahontas? Last time you said it was difficult. Why? (vocabulary? → I gave you the difficult words...) What did you know about Pocahontas before I gave you the story? (nothing)
That's it, you did not know Pocahontas, and you did not know John Smith. That is also why the story was difficult.
Now, tell me what you do first when you read a text. Imagine you take a magazine and start reading it. What do you do first?...

T demonstrates: Here's a text. The headline says: ´*Zachraòte bajkalského tulenì*´ (´*Save the Baikalian Seal*´). And I will think: I remember that Baikal is a lake in Russia, and I know that seal is an animal with a nice fur. And why save them? I think hunters (Russian hunters) want to kill the seals to get money for their furs.
Now I will start reading ... I want to find more about the hunters ... but as I read on I will realize it is not hunters; the seals are dying because the water is disappearing. Why? ... Maybe it's because tourists drink it, or there is a hole in the bottom of the lake, or maybe something is wrong with the weather. Yes, it will be the weather.
And I will read on to find out why....
It is difficult to understand a text when you don't know what it may be about.
Let's get back to the headline. What I did was I recalled words that related to the title. These words were my ´associations´ (explain the term).

2. AIM: Promote pupils' associative thinking and imagination.

T: Let's try *your* associations. I will say a word and you will say what comes to you.

The learners practice **Chain associations**: each pupil will say his/her association to the

previous word*

3. AIM: Demonstrate the benefits of using associations when reading.

T: Now everybody close your eyes and listen to me. I will read you something. Listen carefully. Try to guess what it is about.

T reads the text: It is the most precious thing I have. I always wished to have it, and then I got it for my birthday. I love it. Every morning when I get up, I go to the window and look at it. What a nice color! My wife likes it too. Sometimes she borrows it when she goes shopping because it's large enough for all her things. When she comes back, I always wash it carefully. I never forget to lock the garden door, because I'm afraid someone could steal it. On Mondays, I am happy because I can go to work.

Pupils can open their eyes. They give suggestions about the topic.

T: Now I will show you the text so that you can read it.

Pupils read the text from the blackboard. Afterward they again try to determine the topic.

T acknowledges the headline: MY CAR → Does it make sense now? (Yes.)

T: Why is the man happy to go to work on Mondays? (Because he can drive to work.) Why does he always lock the garden door? (Because the car is parked in the garden.) As you can see, associations really help us to understand a text.

4. AIM: Introduce the theory of main ideas and topic sentences (TS's).

T: We have the topic - my car. Now, imagine it's Monday, and the man (Jo) drives to

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* Alternatives are:

Domino associations: pupils have ´domino stones´ with words on them; the goal is to get rid of all stones by integrating them into the chain.

Give me a prompt: one pupil leaves the classroom; somebody determines a word and all the class write down their associations; then the pupil comes back and chooses 5 people from the class to give him / her prompts so that he / she can guess the word.

Reminders: T reads out a list of words, pupils note down their associations. This can be done at the begging of a lesson. After a while (at the end of the lesson), T asks pupils to reconstruct the original list of words with the help of their notes.

work. But there are many cars in the streets, so he drives very slowly. People who walk by stop and say: What a wonderful car you've got! And he says: It is the most precious thing I have. ...

When he says this for the 10th time, he says just: *I got it for my birthday. I love it. I never forget to lock the garden door, because I'm afraid someone could steal it. On Mondays, I am happy because I can go to work.*

What will he say to the 30th person he meets? ... Try to leave out all unimportant things. (*I love it./ It is the most precious thing I have.*)

T explains that a sentence that summarizes the main idea of a paragraph is called a ´topic sentence´.

T: A paragraph is a group of sentences about one main idea. A TS is a sentence that tells the main idea.

- It is usually the first / last sentence of a paragraph.(but does not have to be → *I love it*.).
- It is usually more general than other sentences. It often refers to more than one thing. Plurals and words such as *many, a lot of, several, all, ...* often signal a TS.
- Try to switch the sentence into a question. If the other sentences seem to answer your question, it is likely to be the TS.

The other sentences are called support sentences.

- They are more specific; they talk about one single part / idea / thing. They bring details, reasons, examples, explanations, consequences, etc.
- Common words are: *for example, first, second, etc., some, others,...*

5. AIM: Provide further practice of identifying TS's.

T: Now, read the 3 paragraphs I gave you and try to find the TS's. Study the words, try to make questions, and so on. Underline the TS's in the text. When you are ready, discuss your answers with your neighbor.

Pupils work independently; T monitors their progress.

The extracts:

Once upon a time there lived a king. The king was old and tired. He wanted to pass the throne to one of his children. But he had no son, just three daughters. ...

Many people drink milk. Some people mix it with fruit to make shakes. Others have cornflakes with milk for breakfast. Children like to drink it with cocoa.

Pocahontas ran to John Smith and put her head on top of his head. Now the strong Indian could not drop the rock. "Father, do not kill this man," said Pocahontas, "I think that he will help our people." And so Pocahontas saved John Smith.

REFLECTION

The goal of the first activity was to focus the learners' attention on the cognitive processes they undertake while trying to comprehend a text. Such awareness is vital when the aim is to teach the pupils to control these processes. Teacher modeling is a key principle of Direct Instruction. It is used to demonstrate the intended strategy as well as to increase pupils' confidence to talk about their thinking processes. At first, it may seem ridiculous to voice one's thoughts, but on the other hand it may be amusing. After the initial reluctance to engage in such a ´show-off´, the pupils gradually became more interested in sharing their thoughts and associations.

Since associative thinking and imagination foster prediction, which eventually facilitates reading comprehension, I developed a whole range of activities to promote the learners' ability to generate associations (Chain associations, Dominoes, etc. These were not all conducted within one lesson.). The pupils enjoyed all of them, because they were learning through games. While playing the games, they were learning to discover how their knowledge is organized and how individual items are interrelated. It is crucial that the pupils understand connections between individual pieces of information in their brain, for once pupils have discovered the existing web of connections, they can deliberately activate these links to enhance prediction. It was the game-like nature that made these activities even more powerful, although hard-core supporters of Direct Instruction would probably deprecate games as games tend to stress enjoyment, deemphasizing the actual purpose of learning. On the contrary, Direct Instruction requires the learner to be constantly aware of the purpose since knowing the purpose represents a strong internal drive for most learners. To resolve this discrepancy, I would like to point out that the purpose of learning the prediction strategy was clearly established in Activity 1. Activity 2 was not intended to teach the strategy, but rather to practice the skill necessary for learning the strategy. In Activity 3, the skill became part of the strategy and purpose awareness was reinforced.

Whenever using Direct Instruction, it is also essential that learners be acquainted with the purpose of learning a particular strategy before this strategy is explained and practiced. They should clearly understand why this strategy is useful. The most effective way of making pupils realize the advantages of knowing a certain strategy (or better to say the disadvantages of not knowing it) is to have them need the strategy.

To this end, I had them listen to the text called ´My Car´. I instructed them to keep their eyes closed in order to trigger their imagination. When I had finished reading, all the pupils looked puzzled, not having the least sense of what the text was about.

In the next step, I had them read the text from the blackboard. They were browsing through the text in search of some clues that would enable them to extract a meaning. Eventually, a few pupils dared suggest the topic (*money*, *a dog*), but none of them succeeded and the rest of the class quickly managed to prove their guesses erroneous.

Finally, I provided them with the title, which immediately directed them to the right meaning of the text in accordance with D. Ausubel's theory of *Advance Organizers* (For further reference see The Psychology of Meaningful Verbal Learning, 1963.) Having accessed the meaning of the text, the pupils could fully appreciate the role of associations in the process of reading. To stress the importance of associative thinking in the construction of meaning, I asked the learners why they thought they failed to recognize the topic before I supplied the title. Although one pupil attributed his inability to identify the topic earlier to his having his eyes closed, the rest of the class determined it was because not knowing the title had prevented them from taking advantage of associating the text with their existing knowledge.

In Activity 4, the learners eventually reduced Jo's speech to the sentence *It is the most precious thing I have.* They found it to be the most important sentence in the paragraph. After I labeled it TS and introduced the underlying theory, the learners practiced detecting TS's in another 3 texts. While they managed to apply the rules they had learned in the first 2 extracts, they were unable to find the TS in the third one. This may have been caused by the TS being placed at the end of the paragraph, which they had not yet encountered. Since I did not want them to approach it mechanically, having acknowledged the correct answer I demonstrated how the other sentences support the TS. Finally, I turned the pupils' attention to Jo's story again, and asked them to reexamine the text and find another possible TS. I had to guide them to discovering the other option. Maybe I should not have proceeded so quickly, because some of the pupils got confused. Next time, I would probably wait until the learners have become more confident in detecting TS's that introduce paragraphs.

8. B - LESSON PLAN 2

1. AIMS: Warm-up, enhance associative thinking and link-making, foster pupils' imagination (OBJECTIVE: Ss will guess the original word.)

T: We will start with a riddle. I will tell you words - my associations - and you will guess the original word. Once you know it, shout it out.
So my first word is *decorate*
candles
chains
pine answer: **X-mas tree**
tinsel
Germany
green
gifts

T explains *tinsel* (+ any other unknown vocabulary if needed).

2. AIMS: Identify the topic sentence and the support, make the pupils realize the links.

T: Now I will tell you the whole story: The best-known symbol of Christmas is the Christmas tree. The tradition of decorating a green tree comes from Germany. Today we decorate it with chains, candles, glass balls and tinsel. In the end, we put gifts under the tree.

T: What was it all about? (answer: X-mas tree) → pupils identify the TOPIC
Do you remember what a TOPIC SENTENCE is? (They can answer in Czech.)
Is it general, or specific ? (details, reasons, examples,...) What are some common words? (*many, a lot of*)
Listen again and try to find the topic sentence. Or do you know already? → check

T reads the paragraph again.
Once the pupils have indicated it is the first sentence, T points out that the TS consists of two parts: the topic + what is said about the topic. T shows the pupils how the other sentences support the TS / how they relate to it.

3. AIM: Illustrate paragraph structure by means of visual support.

T introduces the octopus ´paragraph planner´ (⇨App. 7) and puts it up. Then she reads a sentence: *AMERICA IS A WONDERFUL PLACE TO LIVE.* (the TS) and sticks it to the octopus's hat.

T: Now I will give you 4 sentences. 3 of them support the TS, one of them does not fit here. Your task is to guess which one. If you think you know the answer, raise your hand.

T reads the other sentences and puts them up as well:

TEENAGERS CAN DRIVE FROM THE AGE OF 16.
PEOPLE IN AMERICA ARE AFRAID OF TERRORIST ATTACKS.
AMERICANS CAN MOVE TO ANY PLACE IN THE UNITED STATES AND LIVE THERE WITHOUT PASSPORTS.
WHEN YOU ARE GOOD AT YOUR JOB, YOU CAN MAKE A LOT OF MONEY IN AMERICA.

When the class is ready, T holds up one strip at a time, reads the sentence and asks the class to tell her where to put it. T encourages the pupils to justify their choice. (links)

4. AIM: Teach the pupils to rule out the sentence that does not conform to the TS / is even contradictory.

T divides the class into groups of 4 and assigns roles within the groups. Each group will choose a spokesperson, secretary, silence police and task manager.

T gives each group a worksheet with an octopus and a litter bin / dust bin (⇨App. 7). (T asks what we call it.)

T: Now you will do the same in groups. I will give you a set of 4 sentences (⇨App. 7). The red one (here in bold) is the TS. It will go here (T demonstrates it). Then you will read the other sentences. 2 of them are OK, one is not. Your task is to find the one that does not fit.

The groups work at their own pace; once they are ready, T checks it asking for explanation, justification,...

Then they proceed with another set of sentences (3 sets). T checks each group individually.

5. AIMS: Have the pupils apply their knowledge of paragraph structure in production (active knowledge) to enhance their ability to identify the main idea in a text → have them reconstruct the TS afterward.

The groups each get a blank sheet of paper.

T: First of all, choose a name for your group and write it at the top of the page.
I will give you strips of paper with topic sentences on them. Each group will get one. Read it, but do not copy in to your sheets.
Now you have a TS and your task is to make 4 sentences to support your TS. Write them down. (You can use your dictionaries or ask me.)

Once the pupils have put down the 4 sentences, T collects the strips.

T: Now everybody stand up, leave your sentences on your desk and move on to the other group's desk.
Read their sentences carefully and try to guess the original TS. First, look for the topic (what all the sentences are about). Then, decide what is said about it. (Life in America *is wonderful*.)

T monitors their progress; the groups move once again.

Feedback: T reveals the original TS´s and discusses differences (+ causes) with the class (⇨See App. 7).

REFLECTION

In the first activity, they did quite well. Although they could guess the *Christmas tree* only at the word *gifts*, once they had listened to the whole paragraph, they were able to mark the topic sentence immediately. This activity also convinced me that they had mastered the underlying theory, for they were able to define a topic sentence using their own words ("øídící vìta v odstavci"), to classify it as a rather general sentence in contrast to the rest of the paragraph. Moreover, they supplied examples of words frequently used in topic sentences, referring to the text we worked on in the previous lesson. Therefore, I just pointed out the links between the topic sentence and the other sentences. I also analyzed the topic sentence itself in terms of the topic and the idea expressed about the topic. In fact, the pupils did it themselves.

Regarding the cut text about life in America (Activity 3), the class did not proceed so smoothly. As they were reporting their suggestions to me, I realized that the majority of the class thought that the sentence *´Teenagers can drive from the age of 16.´* was to be labeled unfitting. However, most of them could not tell why. In order to prevent further confusion, I decided to go through the sentences with the whole class. First, I asked them to predict what kind of information may be included in a sentence that would support the topic sentence *´America is a wonderful place to live.´* I gave them other examples such as *´ There are tornadoes in America,´* etc., asking them to decide whether to include or exclude the sentence. Having concluded that there should be positive things in the support sentences, the pupils easily identified the one contradictory sentence. Finally, they explained to me why they got mistaken - they saw the words *America / Americans* in all the sentences except for the one dealing with teenagers. Thus, they assumed that the level of specification be the major factor to build their decision on. Since they failed to observe that the specification does not have to be expressed explicitly in a sentence and that the overall meaning of the sentence is of primary importance here, they arrived at a wrong conclusion.

In Activity 4, they proved they had accommodated these difficulties. They were also given an opportunity to share their ideas, discuss any possible difficulties within the groups and thus refine their understanding. When they made a mistake, the groups managed to correct themselves and find relevant explanations.

Believing they had learned to discriminate a topic sentence from a support sentence and to identify any sentence that does not agree with the controlling idea, I implemented an activity

that included writing at the level of sentence production (Activity 5). Even though my diploma thesis does not aim at the development of writing skills, I believe reading and writing are interconnected, especially in communicating meaning through text, which is both analysis and production. In the way, once the pupils have to use their knowledge actively, writing support for a topic sentence, they see the process of communication from the other side, through the eyes of the author. Having experienced the ways of coding meaning into a passage of writing, they are in a better position when interpreting texts. In short, active production of text based on the rules of text composition in turn enhances the ability to recover meanings from a piece of writing. Whenever pupils engage in writing, they start reading automatically. In this activity, first they had to read their own sentences, and then another reading followed when they were to reconstruct the original TS's.

I knew that the pupils had had no systematic writing instruction, yet I was astonished by the number of grammatical and spelling mistakes they made. At first, I thought of correcting them, but I did not do it mainly because the class was engaged in content-oriented writing and any attempts to correct mistakes might have distracted the pupils from the main goal. In addition, it is motivating when the pupils can work with their own texts, free of teacher intervention. Therefore, I decided not to interfere as long as their ideas were easily recoverable from their sentences.

I really appreciated the sentence *´I want to have my own plane but I haven't got any money.´*, since it both expresses the desire for a plane and excludes the possibility of simply buying it.

The Killers struggled with the task more than the other groups. Maybe, the sentence I gave them was not general enough. Or vice versa, perhaps I should have specified what kind of criminal the man was. On the other hand, they could have simply used the word *criminal* in their sentences. I also gave them a number of prompts and suggestions what to include (especially his appearance), but they did not listen to my advice and since the focus was on fluency, I avoided forcing them to follow my comments.

On the whole, Activity 5 made them more aware of paragraph structure in that they realized how small inconsistencies may result in different interpretation. For instance, the Dustbin Girls focused on animals that ate people in 3 out of 4 sentences. This made the Killers believe the topic sentence read *´Animal eat a people.´* During the feedback discussion, the Killers learned they should read more carefully next time. The Dustbin Girls looked very surprised that someone could have misinterpreted their sentences since they reduced the

danger animals represent for man unintentionally. This activity definitely served its purpose, for it both indicated that the pupils had achieved a good understanding of paragraph organization and, above all, it brought the issue of expressing meaning through text to their attention.

8. B - LESSON PLAN 3

Proceeding from the postulate that once developed in pupils' mother tongue, reading comprehension strategies can be transferred to L2, I wanted to probe the pupils' ability to detect TS's in L1.

1. AIM: Test the pupils' ability to detect topic sentences (TS) when reading in L1.

T: How many stars are there in the sky? Do you know some of them by name? What were they named after? Why ´Leo´ ?... Now, I will draw a picture for you of a special constellation. (T draws the Pleiades.) Do you know what's this called?… PLEIADES. How many stars are there in the Pleiades?... (6) And many, many years ago, these stars were children, they were 6 little boys.
You will now read what happened to the boys. It is an old Indian tale. You will read it in Czech.

T distributes the Czech version of the story (⇨App. 8).

Pupils read the story for themselves.

T asks a pupil to retell the story in his/her own words. T asks the whole class whether they liked the story.

(The following task can be conducted in Czech.)

T: Teï se na ten text podívejte, hlavnì na tu druhou èást. Není na ní nìco divného? (Není rozdìlena na odstavce, text je slitý.)...
Vaším úkolem teï bude rozdìlit tu druhou èást na odstavce, a to tak, abyste tam našli dalších 6 odstavcù.

Žáci se pokusí pasáž rozèlenit, poté text odloží stranou. (T monitoruje úspìšnost.)

_____

English: Have a look at the text once more, focus on the second part. What's strange about it? (It is not divided into paragraphs, it is compact.)

Your task now will be to divide the second part into 6 more paragraphs.

T monitors the pupils as they work on the task. Once they have finished, they put the text aside for a while.

2. AIMS: Revise the theory of paragraph structure and characteristic traits of a TS in contrast

to ´support´ sentences.

T: Now, you will read the same story in English (⇨App. 8).

T: (Once they have finished reading) Look at the first paragraph. Where is the topic sentence? Can you find it?

What do you remember about a TS? ⇨ a sentence with the most general meaning ("øídící vìta")

⇨ usually the first / last sentence of a paragraph

⇨ likely to contain words like: *all, many,...*

And what about the other sentences? What do they tell us?

⇨ give details, reasons, examples, explanations,...to support the TS

⇨ likely to contain words like: *some, others, sometimes, for example, because,...*

3. AIMS: Have the pupils apply this knowledge in dividing a passage of writing into paragraphs. Compare their performance in English with that in L1.

T: Have a look at the first paragraph of the story we read ⇨ also *they, them, their, he, his, him,...* (T may write it up if necessary.)

Now we'll practice it. I will give you 3 sentences and you will try to guess which one is the TS:

GEORGE BUSH WANTS TO STRIKE. (demonstrate ´strike´)

IN SUMMER IT'S VERY HOT IN IRAQ.

WAR ON IRAQ WILL BREAK OUT SOON. (break out = begin)

Pupils give reasons, applying the rules summarized on the blackboard.

T: And now back to the story. T asks the pupils to comment on the support sentences in the first paragraph in terms of the kind of information expressed (detail, example, reason,...).

The class proceeds in the story until a new topic is introduced by means of the next TS.

T may try to illustrate the process of text composition by comparing it to the subway. At each station it takes on passengers, but only those going to the destination it is bound for. It stops there until all the passengers have got on. Then it moves on to the next station and so on...

T: Now, do the same with the rest of the story. Mark a TS first, then take the next sentence and ask what kind of information it gives you. Does it add something to your TS? If not, it will be a new TS.

Pupils do the task - first individually, then they compare it with their neighbor, and finally the T checks it with the whole class (See App. 8).

REFLECTION

The aim of this lesson was to explore the pupils' ability of understanding the role of topic sentences within a larger unit of text, particularly the way topic sentences correspond with its division into paragraphs, i.e. the way texture reflects thematic subdivision.

The pupils had so far been trained to identify topic sentences in single paragraphs. This time, they were to proceed beyond paragraph level, to a series of paragraphs sequenced to form a connected text.

The decision I had to make was about text type. Assuming that the pupils had had little experience with argumentation or comparison-contrast texts, and regarding expository texts rather static, I chose the narrative. The narrative seemed to be ideal for teaching text structure for two main reasons. First, from the early age children are exposed to fairy tales and other stories so that they are well familiar with the structure of simple narrative texts. Second, the narrative, in contrast to expository writing, is based on a plot, which the children can easily follow and which, in fact, constitutes the ´backbone´ of the text, copying the development of the theme. On the contrary, the beginning test as well as the subsequent training activities revealed that while most of the learners were able to identify the TS in a piece of expository writing, they would not detect it in a paragraph of a simple narrative, which is in flat contradiction to the hypothesis of the narrative being the easiest text type for the pupils to work with in terms of reading comprehension. In spite of this finding, I chose the narrative, because I believe it is one of the basic text types used in communication.

Once the pupils had developed general understanding of the role of topic sentences in an English text, I started thinking about giving them a text in Czech in order to test their ability to detect topic sentences in their mother tongue. This experiment was to prove that reading comprehension is not a matter of any particular language, but rather of a general mental skill. As such, it may be applied in whatever language you choose once the learners have adopted the necessary strategies. Therefore, there is a good reason not to believe that using their mother tongue learners are automatically in a better position to understand the structure of text, and ergo meaning of text.

In contrast to this assertion, most of the teachers given the questionnaire responded that they found it impossible to attain such structural comprehension in their pupils in a foreign language. The principle cause of this phenomenon is that they fail to perceive the relationship between understanding the structure of text and literal understanding, which, to many of them,

equals the knowledge of vocabulary (and grammar). Even though inefficient literal understanding, depending chiefly on the learner's knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical rules, may certainly be an obstacle in reading comprehension in a foreign language, **full** mastery of lexicon and grammar should not be regarded as a condition sine qua non for other forms of comprehension. Once it is rendered a necessary prerequisite, the development of other forms of comprehension may be needlessly postponed or even completely neglected because the lack of vocabulary and structures will in most cases prevent the lower-secondary-school pupils from thorough literal understanding. Still, there exist other methods of teaching reading comprehension that enable the teacher to resolve the problem of learners' literal comprehension by considerably diminishing or eliminating vocabulary and grammatical difficulties. I made use of parallel texts and of preteaching the difficult vocabulary.
When other forms of comprehension start developing, they in turn enhance literary comprehension, for the various components of reading comprehension operate in a complex interplay.

We started with the Czech text (Activity 1) so as to alleviate the load of difficult language and thus to ensure literary comprehension later on when the English version has been introduced. I noticed that the learners were striving hard to meet the required number of paragraphs, displaying lack of tactics and systematic work, drawing up paragraph boundaries at random. On average, one paragraph was marked correctly out of six possible.

Before my giving them the English version, we revised the theory of paragraph structure and topic sentences (Activity 2). Being asked to identify the TS among the 3 sentences concerning the war on Iraq, only 3 out of 14 pupils voted for *George Bush wants to strike*, the others answered correctly. In the next step, I asked the pupils to explain how the ´support´ sentences related to their TS (*George Bush wants to strike.*) - whether they gave illustrating details, reasons, consequences etc. Providing that they accepted the sentence *George Bush...* to be the TS, the sentence *War on Iraq will break out soon* may express a consequence. However, the third one (*In summer it's hot in Iraq.*) apparently did not fit into any category, so the three learners realized their mistake and even started laughing when I said the two unrelated sentences in Czech in order to make the incompatibility stand out.

After the learners were given the English version of the story (Activity 3), we went through the first paragraph sentence by sentence, indicating what kind of information each particular sentence contained. The class recognized that they all brought details. Then I

encouraged the pupils to continue on their own with the rest of the story and only when they are ready to consult their solutions with their neighbor.

In comparison to their performance with the Czech text, the success rate increased by one paragraph on average in the individual stage, and after the pupils managed to correct another few mistakes during the pair discussion, it reached 50%, i.e. the pupils succeeded in marking 3 paragraphs out of 6 possible.

The following two paragraph boundaries caused particular difficulties to most pupils:

... Stars are always beautiful and always safe.‖ *So the boys went up to the sky...*

...because many animals died too.‖ *Then the rains came.*

The pupils would not mark the paragraph boundaries there as they classified the sentences *So...* and *Then...* as consequences. Yes, they can be considered consequences or effects in that the boys would not have gone up to the sky if they had not decided to become stars, nor would the rains have come without the dog chief's interception. Nevertheless, in the sense, the narrative consists of a series of consequential events. The purpose of these, however, is not to illustrate or add to the previous TS, but to carry the plot, which may not be easy to differentiate between in initial stages of reading comprehension training.

I explained to the class that when such ´consequence-like´ sentences concern the main topic of the story, especially when they reintroduce it after something else has been mentioned, they are usually independent topic sentences. Similarly, expressions such as *so, then, finally* often signal progression in the plot. Moreover, in the closing sentence, the connection between the rains and the dog chief's plea is rather implied and may be subject to discussion.

On the whole, the pupils' performance with the English text was remarkably better, mainly because they had grasped the basic principles of text composition and had taken advantage of this knowledge in analyzing text structure. They had also adopted relevant comprehension strategies, which they can now transfer to Czech since these strategies are not language-bound. What is temporarily language-bound (in this case English-bound) is the ability to apply these strategies.

In Activity 1, I prevented such transfer by not reminding the pupils of the strategy until after the work with the Czech text, with the aim to prove that knowing the viable strategy may partly compensate for the pupils' lack of experience in reading English texts. The above experiment proved this claim to be substantiated.

(7) EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

In both classes, evaluation of outcomes was directed at the specific area of knowledge identified and developed on the basis of the onset test. Thus, in the 8th grade it was conducted by means of a post-test aimed at the comparison of pupils' understanding of story grammar in English and in Czech (For details see 8. B - LESSON PLAN 3). In the 9th grade, I based the evaluation on my own observation and reflection (See the Lesson Plans section). The reason why I did not use any formal test was that had I wanted to map the progress the learners had made, I would have had to test them individually so that I could compare their performance before and after the training. Doing it, I would denounce my chief postulate, that optimal reading instruction at schools should make use of class discussion to negotiate meaning of text.

In order not to base the assessment of my project solely on self-evaluation, I interviewed the pupils involved. Most of the pupils reported they liked this way of working with texts, although it had been completely new to them - which had discouraged some of them at the beginning. They appreciated the opportunity to "find their own bit" - a meaning no one else in the class discovered. As for concrete activities, they took particular pleasure in the activities on prediction, because they could express themselves freely, "they could employ fantasy" and discuss the meaning of what they read. A number of pupils from 9. A also appreciated drawing as an alternative response format in reading.

Of course, the learners' reports were not only positive. Two 9th-graders expressed doubts about the contribution of the training to their understanding of reading texts. They complained about not being able to understand the texts they worked with in terms of vocabulary. They also considered the suggested procedure of comprehending text too difficult and demanding.

Despite the fact that the majority of pupils claimed to have enjoyed the tasks and to have learned something, they at the same time admitted they would not probably apply the whole procedure in their own reading (outside the classroom) unless they were asked to do so, because it was rather lengthy and complicated. Yet, I am convinced that once they need to comprehend an English text which deters the ´conventional´ approach, they will recall what we did and they will be grateful to know the strategies. The post-test and the interviews, as well as my observation, suggest that most of the pupils ARE able to reflect on their reading, and consciously choose and apply the strategies they have learned. That is no small achievement, because, as Griese concludes, " when such an attitude of reflective thought

becomes self-initiated, the problem of reading comprehension will be well on its way to being solved"(1977, p. 9).

Most often, when such an experiment has been completed, the class resumes the good traditional ways of learning they had used before, which may fill the pupils with a sense of futility. In my case, the English teacher resolved to continue in the way of working with text I had pioneered.

III. CONCLUSION

This Professional Project intended to investigate potential benefits of the use of Direct Instruction for the development of learners' reading comprehension skills and strategies in EFL classes with special attention to facilitation of higher-level thinking and reasoning. The aim was to prove that Direct Instruction may accelerate pupils' advancement toward higher levels of reading comprehension.

Consistently, the practical model drew upon the large body of methodological research conducted by Engelmann, Carnine, Rosenshine, Gersten, Stauffer, and others. Based on their findings, the key principles of the activities used in this project boil down to:

(1) the use of direct explanation and teacher modeling to present a designated comprehension strategy
(2) mediating teacher guidance until the pupils become adept enough in using the strategy autonomously

However, doctrinaire implementation of the above principles can hardly be effective with lower-secondary school children, since their learning efforts are seldom directed to the completion of long-term goals emphasized in Direct Instruction. Therefore, I made the following adjustments:

- Predominantly, I reduced the teacher's role in determining the reading purpose by implementing learner prediction.
- I encouraged student-student discussion as well as whole-class discussion to increase learner activity and enhance information sharing.
- Games and tasks encouraging a variety of response formats were included to increase diversity of interpretation so as to compensate for the amount of prescriptive rules and guidelines.

Accordingly, the activities sought to:

a) help the learners monitor and direct their reading comprehension by teaching strategies
b) put the reading process more in their hands
c) promote higher-level thinking and reasoning,

and thereby enrich the pupils' reading experience and foster reading comprehension.

Let me now summarize the pros and cons of Direct Instruction as they have emanated from my experiences in conducting the Professional Project and the findings I have evolved during the practical implementation thereof.

⊕ The analysis of outcomes (II. 7) clearly proves that successful implementation of Direct Instruction has the potential to significantly raise learner achievement in reading comprehension.

⊕ Direct reading instruction promotes the development of higher-level thinking and reasoning - mental skills pupils cannot dispense with in real-life problem solving.

⊕ Direct Instruction puts the learner in control of the construction of meaning of text, ergo fostering his/her independence, and at the same time providing for an increasingly individualized reading experience. As a result, pupils gradually learn not to rely on teacher interpretation of meaning, which is a key prerequisite for their becoming autonomous readers. In addition, the possibility of individualized perception leads to increased learner involvement, for pupils are free to invent their own interpretations, combining the text-inherent meanings with their own experience. In other words, they are free to seek themselves in the text - which is the essence of extensive reading. In this sense, direct reading instruction may be a way of indirectly developing extensive reading at school. Furthermore, freedom of interpretation supports divergent thinking and stimulates creativity.

⊕ Concerning further implications for language teaching and learning, Direct Instruction may contribute to the learner's development of writing skills by focusing on text structure, since the clues efficient readers search for to negotiate meaning of text

correspond with those good writers incorporate in the text to assist readers in constructing such meaning. Hence the improved understanding of the reading-composing relationship.

(+) Stressing the interactive nature of the reading process and recognizing the significance of information sharing during the construction of meaning, Direct Instruction requires pupils to voice their thoughts. Once they have to report on what they think, they engage in reflective thought. Besides that, they learn to express their thoughts, as well as to present and defend their arguments, which at the same time marks another area of language skills facilitated by the implementation of direct reading instruction - speaking.

(+) Last but not least, Direct Instruction is teacher-friendly in so far as it does not impose extra demands on classroom equipment, space, number of pupils, etc.

(+) Finally, unlike corrective feedback Direct Instruction can be easily modified so as to reflect changing learning environment. Duffy & Roehler (1993) indorse this claim, saying that Direct Instruction is a "carefully developed, well structured and explicit effort to achieve particular curricular goals with the particular group of students you are teaching at the moment“ (p. 289). This flexibility stems from the fact that Direct Instruction responds to the flaws of the strategy used, whereas corrective feedback evaluates the product.

In spite of the fact that I, myself, have not yet detected any serious impediment, the teachers answering my questionnaire complained about not having enough time, materials, and information.

(-) With regards to the time factor, several teachers maintain that Direct Instruction is rather time consuming, the amount of time "wasted" not being worth the outcomes reached. In addition, they put forward that Direct Instruction is a strategy drill that will only distract pupils from reading. Of course, it may happen that as a result of being so explicit about salient features of a strategy, steps and sequences, the teacher unintentionally reduces reading into a set of meaningless steps to be rote-learned. Yet,

as the goal is to develop strategic approach to text, teachers should take great care to avoid that. At any rate, Direct Instruction is not a rote and drill approach to teaching, for strategies epitomize generalizations. Tarver (1998, p. 19) asserts that generalizations represent efficiency, while rote learning represents inefficiency. He estimates that during 45 minutes the teacher may be able to teach pupils 3 rote items or 1 generalization. The generalization, however, permits the pupils to respond to many items. The work on rote items, on the contrary, produces performance on only the 3 items taught. Hence, the teaching of the generalization is far more efficient than the teaching of the rote items. Once a generalization has been learned, it may be applied in different circumstances - thus, reading comprehension strategies can be transferred from pupils' mother tongue to a foreign language and vice versa.

- The alleged lack of suitable reading materials is not to be a reason for avoiding Direct Instruction, since in most cases what really matters is the tasks, not the text. Thus, a teacher who is familiar with the basic theory of reading comprehension and the principles of Direct Instruction can easily take almost any text and design tasks that will address the level of comprehension he/she intends to develop.

- It is clear from what I have just said that in contrast to the previous two factors, lack of information represents a serious obstacle for the use of Direct Instruction in classes. First, teachers are usually inclined to adopt the ways of teaching they experienced as school children. Since Direct Instruction has long been in the stage of experiments (Project Follow Through realized in the years 1967 - 1995 is perhaps the largest educational experiment ever conducted.), Czech teachers have not yet been given the opportunity to see it working.
  Second, it is new, and therefore little information is available on the application of Direct Instruction in the Czech educational milieu. Recently, The Common European Referential Frame for Languages (2001) laid down a new conception of language teaching and learning, the same standards being applied throughout all Europe. The section of the document concerning reading presents guidelines for selection of reading tasks and materials, and discusses innovative trends, the most important of which are:

- formulating specific aims of reading instruction for distinct reading skills (reading for gist, reading for argumentation,...) at all levels of proficiency
- orientation on the learner with special regards to cognitive, affective and linguistic factors
- emphasis on reading and reasoning strategies.

These recommendations markedly converge with the overall aims of the direct reading activities conducted in this Professional Project [a), b), c) above]. In fact, the focus on strategies speaks in favor of the use of Direct Instruction, since "strategies are better taught by direct than by indirect instruction" (Duffy & Roehler, 1993, p. 288). Therefore, eventually it will be necessary for teachers to get acquainted with the method of Direct Instruction anyway. To start with, they may study either the complete set of exercises used in the PISA research, or a sample set of exercises submitted by Czech teachers respecting the same principles. Both sets are accessible in *Netradièní úlohy aneb èteme s porozumìním* (Kramplová, I. et al. Praha: Ústav pro informace ve vzdìlávání, 2002).

It is apparent from the examination of assets and caveats of the use of Direct Instruction in teaching reading comprehension that the advantages preponderate over the disadvantages. Now, there is a strong evidence to justify the thesis of my project; I have proved that Direct Instruction has a positive effect on learner achievement in reading comprehension, emphasizing the mastery of metacognitive strategies. Obviously, there are limitations to my findings due to the circumstances of the research project - the data I collected are not representative in that the study was conducted on a very limited group of learners. Moreover, since I did not conduct any comparative test, the results were based to a large extend on my subjective observation. Even though my findings defer generalization, they are consistent with the findings of Gersten and Carnine (1986, p. 71), who examined 3 studies that involved comparing the effects of corrective feedback and Direct Instruction in improving reading comprehension. The studies focused on the ability to draw inferences, knowledge of text structure, and the ability to detect faulty arguments. They succeeded in proving that Direct Instruction markedly improved reading comprehension in all students regardless of their level of reading proficiency.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 2: TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Text being one of the 3 independent variables entering the reading process (text, reader, method), its characteristics may significantly affect reading comprehension, particularly the level of reading comprehension achieved.

Although many teachers admitted using supplementary reading materials, what they rely on primarily is coursebook. That is why I found it useful to analyze the most frequently used coursebook. Having ascertained that 2 in 3 lower-secondary school teachers use Project English by Tom Hutchison, I analyzed Projects I and II, evaluating the reading texts in terms of variety of type, connectedness, and suitability for the development of higher-level comprehension. I was also interested in the range of reading activities offered by this textbook.

In the general guidelines section of the Teachers Book, Hutchison claims to present "a variety of text types", embracing dialogs, letters, tables, factual descriptions, labeled diagrams, maps, and comic strips. However, what is declared to be a wide choice of text types is a rather narrow selection.

On closer examination, most of the texts concerned may be classified as disconnected. Whilst working with disconnected texts, it is necessary to take into account that they appeal to different processing strategies than connected texts.

Dialogs, if connected, are deviant in that they substitute spoken discourse of which they are transcripts, following the same information structure.

In comic strips and picture stories, dialogical replicas combine with pictures to convey the author's message, much of the meaning thus being carried by nontextual devices.

Assuming that recognizing information structure is a bridge toward increased reading comprehension, one may doubt the plausibility of using comic strips and dialog entries in developing reading comprehension. Yet, it is not to say that dialogs, picture stories, and comic strips ought to be avoided in teaching reading comprehension; they just should not be used exclusively, for they are devoid of certain distinct traits most reading texts display.

Other texts in Project English are fragmented or scattered chaotically all around the page; paragraph division is severely neglected and perception marred.

The exercises accompanying reading texts usually share the following characteristics:

a) They check outcomes rather than monitor the process of reading comprehension.

b) Only scarcely do they go beyond the literal level of comprehension, emphasizing recall of facts (Right / Wrong / Don't Know)
c) They do not stimulate pupils to form opinions, or to develop hypotheses and make their own judgments about the text.

In spite of the fact that Project II generally features longer and more connected texts as well as exercises on sentence ordering and story completion, these are still rather isolated attempts than a systematic effort to teach reading comprehension. The goals of reading instruction are not specified in the Teacher's Book, either.

To conclude, though used by most lower-secondary school teachers in Liberec, Project English has proved unsatisfactory in providing for learners' development of reading comprehension skills and strategies.

Appendix 3: ONSET TEST

I administered the onset tests for two purposes. Predominantly, I needed to assess the pupils' ability to comprehend text at different levels in order to collect data that would help me direct instructional attention to areas of particular difficulty. Second, I wanted to understand the relationship between learner achievement and classroom instruction.

The onset tests each consisted of a connected text (at least 2 paragraphs long) and a set of tasks related to the text. The texts were adjusted to ensure the appropriate level of difficulty. The tasks were graded according to the level of comprehension required. To facilitate comprehension, less frequent or unknown words were provided along with their Czech equivalents, or whole tasks were conducted in Czech.

The 9th-grade pupils were confronted with an expository text concerning the history of Guy Fawkes Night (adapted from *Reward Pre-intermediate*. Greenall, 1994). Since the text was relatively complex, containing an embedded passage of narrative, comprehension tasks of the 2nd (inferential) level were conducted in Czech (T / F).

The specifics of the task lay in the fact that understanding of the gist was tested in 3 different ways. In the first exercise, learners were asked to select the appropriate main idea statement, in the next one (this time in Czech) they were to identify the author's intended main point, and finally they were required to invent a better title, i.e. one that would reflect the gist, or at least that would be more closely related to it.

The results showed that even if the learners succeeded in recovering the author's intention, they often failed to recognize the main idea. Many of them were inclined to accentuate the unsuccessful killing of the King, not attending to the overall message of the text. They confounded the author's message with what attracted their attention the most. Still a lot of them managed to supply a more suitable title, such as *Guy Fawkes Night*, or *Guy ´Straw-Head´ Fawkes*.

In the T / F section of the test, the average success rate reached 72%, although the pupils generally recognized it as the most difficult part of the test.

While we were discussing the test afterward, the pupils again displayed inability to discriminate clearly the author's point. Furthermore, they failed to distinguish facts from opinion statements. Therefore, I decided to teach them to determine the **status of information** obtained through reading, for pupils cannot make valid critical judgments unless they understand the status of premises.

Appendix 4: ONSET TEST

The 8th-graders were given a narrative about Pocahontas (adopted from *Myth Makers*. Kalnitz & Judd, 1986). The text-related tasks tested the learners' ability to:

1. identify the main idea
2. find specific information in the surface structure of the text (i.e. level 1)
3. make inferences
4. perceive text structure (i.e. story grammar)

At the end of the test, I asked the pupils to indicate which exercise they had found the most difficult. The test brought several important findings, the percentage showing success rate for each of the 4 areas tested:

MAIN IDEA	44%
SPECIFIC INFO - LEVEL 1	59% (average rate)
LEVEL 2	52% (average rate)
ORDERING (STRUCTURE)	0%

Besides, I found out that the pupils were rather unaware of their strengths and weaknesses, which signal lack of reflective thought. Many of them rated a task in which they proved successful as extremely demanding and vice versa.

Consistent with my findings, most of the 18 teachers who answered my questionnaire are convinced that reading for gist is the most demanding skill for their pupils. A comparably great number of respondents believe it is extensive reading. Yet, at the same time, they admit they do not allow time for extensive reading in their lessons. Generally, the teachers most often practice reading for specific information at the literal level of comprehension (i.e. specific information stated explicitly in the text). Reading for gist is also frequent, typical tasks being title matching and multiple choice matching. As for the exercises fostering pupils' understanding of story grammar, almost all the teachers have their pupils engage in retelling stories in their own words, while relatively few teachers provide practice in paragraph ordering and outlining.

It is apparent from the table of results that learner achievement in reading correlates with instructional attention. The pupils performed considerably better in the tasks they had often practiced in lessons. Conversely, their achievement in the ordering exercise was extremely poor since they had not been trained to perceive story grammar.

In the light of the test results, I decided to focus my instruction on the two ascertained areas of the lowest achievement score - namely **main idea** and **story grammar**.